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In which our writers find strength in virtual communities, hope in forming connections, and trouble in defining Columbia's legacy.

DEPT. OF THE CUPIDIAN ALGORITHM
From CU to I Do

By Raquel Turner

Picture this: You and four of your closest friends go out one Halloweekend. Two of you end the night at JJ's, one of you goes home with the devil's advocate in your poli sci class, and another gets blackout drunk and wakes up in the Engineering Library. The last friend spills a White Claw on the girl dancing by the drinks table, and next thing you know, you're perusing their wedding registry five years later wondering where the time went. Statistically speaking, this scenario isn't too far-fetched. Research shows that roughly one in five people end up marrying their college sweetheart, meaning for most of us the clock is already ticking. Luckily, Katherine

Zhao, CC ’23, Bella Barnes, CC ’22, and Olivia Ferrucci, CC ’23, ambassadors of the Columbia Marriage Pact, have just the solution.

The Columbia Marriage Pact is a specialized dating service created to connect each participating student with their most mathematically compatible partner from among the Columbia population through a 50-question personality quiz. It presents participants with a series of questions and statements, from “Do you prefer kinky sex?” to “I would volunteer for a COVID-19 vaccine trial.” Test-takers must express their level of agreement on a scale of one to seven.

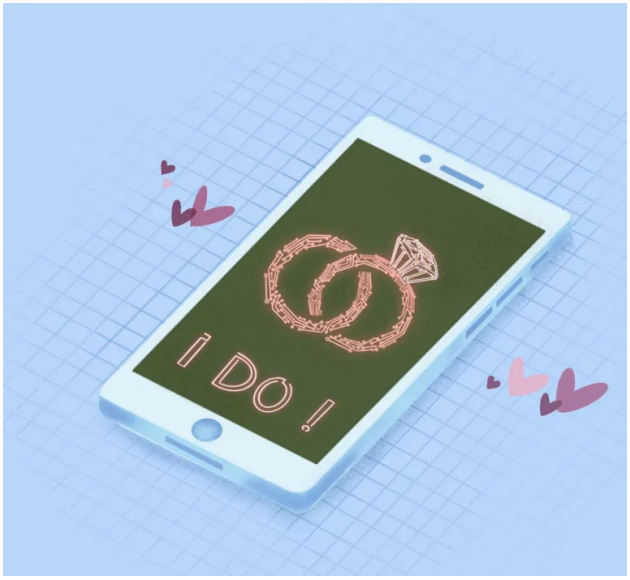

Illustration by Rosaline Qi

“It covers religion and politics, your deepest life values, whatever,” Ferrucci explained. “And the idea is that they’re questions you would literally ask someone on the tenth date, not the first date. Really intimate questions.”

Tried and true, the Marriage Pact formula was actually developed at Stanford in 2017, where it quickly became a campus success. From there, it expanded to a variety of universities, like Yale and USC, before landing at Columbia. Zhao and Barnes were both approached by ambassadors from the Stanford Marriage Pact over the summer. Along with Ferrucci, they became consultants for the project to make the service more Columbia-compatible. They were asked to choose from a selection of pre-made questions from a variety of subjects that they felt matched the personality of the student body. According to Barnes, the qualities that they tried to emphasize were “independence, families, culture, and ambition.”

The results of the questionnaire were anonymously sent back to Stanford, where the Marriage Pact team ran the almost 3,000 submissions through their algorithm and emailed students their matches. I followed up with members of the class of 2023 a week later to see how things went down.

An especially dry dating season was Melissa Juarez’s reason for filling out the pact. Laughing, she explained, “I was putting my eggs in every single basket. My literal eggs.”

But the experience fell short of expectations. Juarez and her match followed each other on Instagram after receiving their emails, but they haven't spoken. She cited intimidation as her reason for not reaching out. "There's a lot of pressure to like them or to be interested in them," she said. "And I think like, honestly, what I would have wanted to get out of it is just a friend." She said she's not likely to try the Marriage Pact again if given the opportunity. But she added, "If it was called the Friendship Pact or something, I would do it. Anyone want to start coding that with me?"

Rommel Nuñez, on the other hand, bit the bullet and DMed his match on Instagram. Sadly, she has yet to respond. Regardless of the disappointing match, he still enjoyed the questionnaire process. "The questions felt important," noted Nuñez. He felt especially passionate about being left at the altar versus leaving someone at the altar. "It really shows a lot about whether you're selfish or selfless." If given the chance, he would definitely fill the Marriage Pact out again.

Josette Content seems to have had better luck than most. She and her match got in contact and spoke over Zoom. Distance has hampered their chances of meeting, but Content is not too upset. "Maybe if they get to campus, I might reach out, 'Hey, want to grab a coffee or something?' We'll see what happens." Like most, she seemed skeptical of the idea that an algorithm can find you love. "I think numbers can tell you people you're similar to but I don't think they'll tell you exactly who should be your best friend or who should be in a relationship with you," she says. Regardless, Content is open to giving the Marriage Pact another chance.

So did the Columbia Marriage Pact produce the results it promised? Maybe not this time around. It is a brand new service operating under unusual circumstances, though. Perhaps with time, Columbia will have its own testimonials of marriage, best friends, and bandmates just as schools like Stanford have already seen. But to paraphrase Zhao, the real appeal of the Marriage Pact was in building a sense of community and excitement on a campus that's been spread miles apart, and I'd say in that, the Marriage Pact has done its job just fine.

DEPT. OF FREQUENCIES
Anyone There?

By Elizabeth Jackson

Look up as you stand in my grandfather's backyard, and you'll see an imposing antenna stretching to pierce the sky, like an enormous metal index finger held up to test which way the wind is blowing. This is no mere television antenna.

This contraption, coupled with the shelves of neatly aligned equipment in his "radio room" (once my uncle's childhood bedroom), facilitates my grandfather's favorite hobby since 1972: amateur radio.

Illustration by Kat Chen

Amateur radio, frequently termed "ham radio," is a method of two-way communication through which licensed operators contact each other by transmitting radio frequencies at levels allocated by national communications authorities—in the U.S., the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). There are three classes of amateur radio licenses: technician, general, and extra. These licenses require separate exams and confer different operating privileges: Extra class licenses allow operators to transmit on any frequency designated for amateur radio, while general and technician licensees are more restricted in the frequencies they are allowed to use. These restrictions have implications for how far an operator is able to transmit under particular atmospheric conditions. Transmissions take various forms, including Morse code and voice communications, and operators can even link computers to their radios to send data like text and images via satellite.

Amateur radio has been widespread since the early 20th century. We now live in a world saturated by more modern communication— texting, social media, cell phones —yet there are still more than two million amateur radio operators worldwide. Teacher's College student Brian Ahn, president of the Columbia University Amateur Radio Club (CUARC), is one such operator. Ahn became involved in amateur radio primarily because of its important role in disaster response and preparedness—more specifically, "because of its ability to save lives, or ability to use communication in emergencies to give to different responders—emergency responders—so that they can do their job." Discussing a group that coordinates amateur radio service efforts,

Ahn emphasized: “It’s all about keeping the community safe.” Because amateur radio does not require the internet or a cell phone network, it is often the only form of communication available when disasters, like hurricanes or massive floods, strike and damage infrastructure.

Ahn was first introduced to amateur radio in 2016 while working for Americorps. Later, when working for the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), he was deployed in response to Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria, and again observed firsthand the necessity of amateur radio in enabling communication during emergencies.

To be permitted to help in an emergency, independent operators must be members of specific regional communications groups. Ahn himself is a new member of the New York City Amateur Radio Emergency Communications Service (NYC ARECS), which works with several nonprofits to assist with emergency communication or with large public events like parades or marathons. NYC ARECS was called upon to render aid during 9/11, when other forms of communication were disrupted.

CUARC began as the Columbia University Experimental Wireless Station around 1906. Since then it has changed names, cycled through periods of dormancy and high-activity, and hopped between campus buildings, finally ending up in the “Ham Shack” on the fourteenth floor of Mudd. CUARC holds monthly meetings, though communal “operating hours” are held weekly. Since the pandemic began, members have been transmitting independently, and recently they’ve started conducting virtual meetings over Zoom.

Club meetings are open to undergraduates, graduate students, alumni, and guests, and as president, Ahn hopes to increase undergraduate interest and membership. Though individuals need a license to operate, Ahn assures me that existing club members would help new members prepare for license exams.

At in-person club meetings, members use either personal equipment or the large communal amateur radio in the Ham Shack to contact operators around the world, sometimes in remote regions where internet or cell service might not be accessible. Ahn described one of his most memorable contacts as an operator from Africa, saying that it sounded as though the contact was on a boat.

For some, part of the hobby’s attraction is the ability to build and use one’s own radio equipment. In 2018, CUARC collaborated with the Columbia Space Initiative to build a “mobile tracking and communications platform,” and they managed to contact the

International Space Station—a rare and sought-after contact for many amateur radio operators. Once the club can meet in person again, they may experiment more with radio construction.

A key focus of the club is recruiting new members and inspiring young people to pursue the hobby. One emerging controversy related to engaging young people is that this year, the FCC proposed a $50 fee for each licensing exam. The American Radio Relay League (ARRL) vigorously opposes this proposed fee imposition, as the Amateur Radio Service comprises only volunteers (with volunteer examiners preparing, administering, and grading exams), so the costs offset by the fees would be minimal. The ARRL has also expressed the concern that such a fee might deter young people from pursuing the hobby, as they may not be able to afford licensing.

Our communication methods have become so efficient that we may forget about the intricacy and wonder associated with talking to a person in a far-flung place. My grandfather has talked for hours with operators he encountered coincidentally, people who were perfect strangers to him at the start of the day. Amateur radio depends somewhat on chance; contacts may share many interests, or they may only share the love of this effortful, hopeful form of communication. Amateur radio still has much to teach us about relating to others, and much to give us in terms of emergency response and contact with people who lack internet or phone access. It's also just exciting—a feeling Ahn eloquently captures.

"It's like magic," he said. "When you're talking on it, you're discovering new and incredible secrets and it's just the fact that you're talking on the radio, you're saying your call sign, and you're waiting, you're pensively waiting to hear some sort of sound, and you finally hear it, and you're talking with someone that you didn't even know before and there's no way of really understanding how—yeah, it's just magic, like, you know, you're on the radio and you hear someone, like throwing a bottle with a letter, with a little note into the ocean and then you find it somewhere—it's kind of like that, discovery."

DEPT. OF FRIENDLY FACES
Culture Clubs Bring It Home

By Sadia Haque

Upon arriving at Columbia, many find themselves with that exhilarating and intimidating sense of being just another face in the crowd, and culture clubs are one

way new students find a welcoming community. This fall, communities that can bring us together have been even more important.

Though culture clubs play an important role in making a virtual college education more bearable, they have their own hurdles to jump through. Transitioning classes to a virtual format may be difficult, but transitioning clubs can be even more complicated.

Illustration by Julia Lin

For Club Bangla, long-standing traditions enabling students to engage with Bengali culture—such as Gaye Halud, a mock-wedding ceremony, and Boishaki, the celebration of Bengali New Year—were difficult to organize online. The move to a digital platform forced Myesha Choudhury, BC ’23, to rethink how Club Bangla could build a community with both returning and incoming students. She has decided to lean into educational events that will help students learn more about Bengali culture and history. She also hopes that the accessibility of Zoom will increase collaboration not only at Columbia, but also at colleges in the New York City area and the other Ivies.

In November, Club Bangla collaborated with the Muslim Student Association (MSA) and Columbia Iranian Students Association (CISA) to host an event discussing slavery and fast fashion with renowned abolitionist organizer Hoda Katebi. The industry, panelists argued, has severe impacts on Bengali people, especially women.

“I was kind of upset we weren’t able to continue the tradition of [Gaye Holud and Boisakhi] cause it’s been going on for so long, Choudhury said. “Hopefully, we can make new traditions in making these new educational events.”

For Misbah Farooqi, CC ’21, the president of the MSA, finding a way to keep her entire club connected and organized was a daunting undertaking. The MSA is a huge organization including students from both the undergraduate and graduate schools on campus whose purpose is to welcome Muslim students to campus and offer a safe space to share their experiences and practice their faith. To accommodate the

transition to Zoom, the MSA decided to create a series of online events such as game night, movie night, and a meet-the-board event that together constituted a "Welcome Week." They also collaborated with the Muslim Afro-Niyyah Student Association (MANSA) to host an online discussion focusing on what it means to be Black and Muslim in America.

Asked how she recruits for the club, Farooqi said, "We're holding a variety of different events that would be of interest to a lot of different people. Obviously, it's not as easy to reach out to people than it would be if we were on campus, but we're trying to really make our social media presence really big this semester."

The Taiwanese American Students Association (TASA) would usually hold large social events teaching the broader Columbia community more about Taiwanese culture. Night in Taiwan, for example, offered students a taste of Taiwanese cuisine and cinema. But obstacles such as Zoom fatigue and significant time differences have rendered community building difficult.

To confront these issues, Claire Kuo, CC '22, one of the chairs of TASA, said, "We wanted to focus on the more internal aspects of the club. We wanted to make sure people had a support system if they needed it. We were putting our attention and the weight of our effort on bonding."

Despite myriad difficulties, culture clubs are doing their best to exist and even thrive as the pandemic rages on. Leaders of these organizations hope that students can still find a warm and enriching cultural experience through their Zoom events.

"I think that it's still important for clubs, like the MSA, to keep running to ensure that people still have that community to come back to," Farooqi said.

The intangible complexities of community aren't always easy to bring to the breakout room. But Columbia's culture clubs are doing their part to give both returning and new students a chance to find these small moments of connection in a changing world.

DEPT. OF PATHOS
Group Therapy, But Put It in Iambic Pentameter

By Noa Fay

"A spark of joy in my week every single week."

“Definitely the highlight of my Sunday.”

“A nice way to talk about literature on a weekend, and that’s very enjoyable.”

To what stellar event could these comments possibly refer? Burden yourself no longer with burning curiosity.

The Columbia University Writer’s Workshop (CUWW) is Columbia’s latest, most unofficial writing club, cobbled together by a handful of passionate writers—including yours truly—who are simply searching for the chance to talk to connoisseurs of all things literary. After reflecting on my own experience in CUWW and speaking with several fellow CUWW members, however, it became clear that we have found fulfillment through more than just a shared love of writing.

Illustration by Maya Weed

Julia Tolda, BC ’23, is incredibly enthusiastic about the workshop, which has been meeting over Zoom every Sunday for the past month. In fact, she admitted to building her entire weekend schedule around CUWW. When asked why she finds it so enjoyable, Tolda answered, “I get a sense of community and connection that is hard to come by . . . I feel present, in the moment, and it makes me feel more like a real person than like a square on Zoom.”

Since the first meeting, I have been keenly aware of the role the CU Writer’s Workshop has played in maintaining my mental health; it forces me to take time out of my week to relax by doing something I enjoy and wouldn’t otherwise have made time to do. As I spoke with fellow writers, though, I realized just how necessary the workshop has been.

The “sense of community and connection” that Tolda reported is a sentiment echoed by other workshop participants. Solomia Dzhaman, SEAS ’23, described CUWW as a “fun community to be a part of” that makes this new era of COVID-19 “not so lonely.”

Louise Matthews de Beaulieu, BC ’23, agreed. She emphasized the importance of maintaining a community and routine, as most of us are still confined to our homes and certainly unable to experience college life as our generation knows—or expects—it to be.

“In the context of COVID and not being able to meet in person,” de Beaulieu said, “it’s important to have these weekly meetings, to keep a rhythm in our schedules overall with people from school.”

Dzhaman concurred eloquently, noting the workshop “is a way to supplement our community.”

De Beaulieu elaborated on the importance of socializing while in quarantine. She talked about how significant connecting with others over “this new club where we all have a common interest” has been to her because it has provided her with a “relaxed environment for sharing vulnerable poetry and other writings” with no negative judgement from anyone. Similarly and endearingly, Dzhaman said she felt the workshop has served as a place she can “go to and just let myself exist without any expectations.”

The writers also spoke about the role writing in general has played in maintaining their mental health, which is part of the reason why they all continue to participate. Dzhaman admitted that she doesn’t always know what to do with a lot of her emotions, but writing helps her sort through them and understand what she’s feeling. “Writing has always been a way to catalyse ideas that are in my brain that I can’t necessarily express in other ways,” she said. De Beaulieu echoed the sentiment, claiming that, for her, writing is refreshing and provides mental clarity. “Writing is a way of separating thoughts from life,” she said. “Life can be very loud. It’s a way to be in a quiet state of mind and put things together.”

Tolda explained that writing has always been a method of relaxation for her. She described herself as someone who often feels anxious, but translating those anxiety- and stress-filled thoughts into poetry and writing calms her down thoroughly. “I think there is nothing that does me well as much as writing does,” she said assuredly.

For many, the mere act of listening to others read their poetry aloud felt calming. “It’s relaxing to hear other people read other pieces,” said de Beaulieu, “and then have a very relaxed conversation about it.” Tolda felt the same; whether it’s writing the poetry, reading it aloud, hearing others read their poems aloud, or just speaking about

poetry and literature in general, every week, she said,"I feel soothed and comforted by the environment we create together."

Dzhaman pointed out that the club's overall low-stakes vibe is what has helped her the most. "The workshop has been a nice outlet for creative work and my mental health," she said. "There's not a huge pressure for anything to be good, it just has to exist. Maybe it'll become something better, or maybe it won't."

Whether it's the lack of pressure, human connection, or hearing new voices read new poetry aloud, CUWW has left its members feeling calm, supported, and listened to week after week. As we continue to attend Zoom University with no clear end in sight, it is crucial that we all take care of ourselves. For some, that means taking a jog through the crisp fall air of Central Park; for others, it means burrowing under a pile of various faux-fur, polyester, and wool blankets and pressing that Netflix *play* button.

And for others still, taking care of ourselves means writing a poem every week and joining a call to share it with other writers.

DEPT. OF VISIBILITY
Now, Before, and Forever

By Elysa Caso-McHugh

As a member of the trans community, I take pride in our ability to support and care for one another. Trans Awareness Week, organized by LGBTQ at Columbia and running from November 16 to November 20 this year, represented just one of the many ways that trans people at Columbia work to build community. Many adjustments had to be made to this year's programming due to the pandemic, but as Associate Director of Multicultural Affairs and LGBTQ Outreach Vanessa Gonzalez-Siegel confirmed, the events still fostered a strong sense of community among queer and trans people.

This year's Trans Awareness Week was a collaborative effort among trans and queer students on a planning board established by Gonzalez-Siegel, with about seven or eight students meeting each

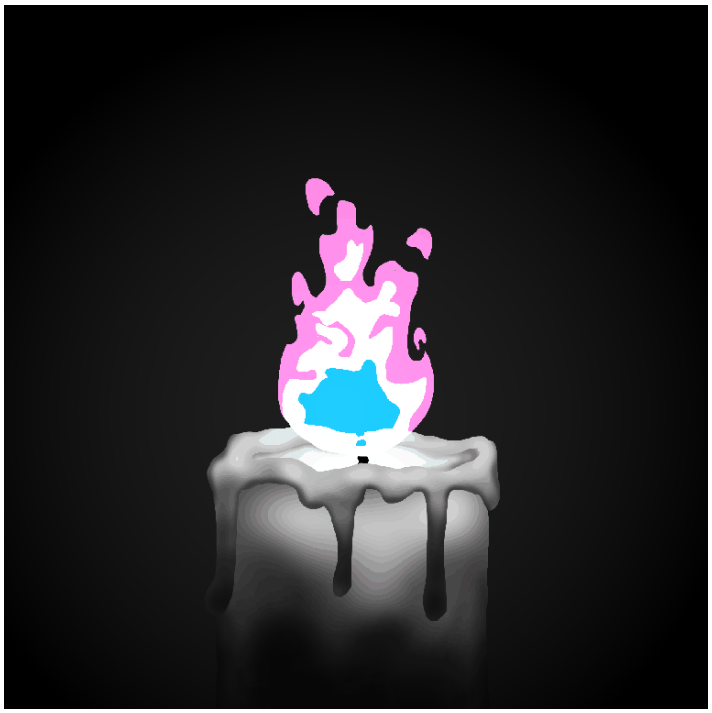

Illustration by Kate Steiner

week. She explained that she was "very open to what the group wants," allowing students to guide the programming so that the events and resources can meet their needs.

LGBTQ at Columbia hosted events every night on Zoom, including an opening ceremony with acclaimed *Pose* actress Dominique Jackson, which was a joint endeavor with the LGBT program at NYU. Kate Steiner, CC '22 and a member of the student planning board, explained that the week also included events that focused on the unique experiences of QTPOC (queer/trans people of color). Though Gonzalez-Siegel and LGBTQ at Columbia attempt to work towards greater inclusion every year, organizers sought to bring this discussion to the forefront this year in response to increased violence against trans people of color.

"From our first meeting as a board we made a point to center QTPOC in Trans Awareness Week," Steiner told me. "We had incredible QTPOC people speak . . . and a QTPOC social event, similar to the Being Beyond the Binary event, as a safe and affirming space for QTPOC folk." Gonzalez-Siegel also explained the importance of including these too-often silenced voices and making sure that each event had a speaker representing the communities that would be discussed, an essential aspect of ensuring this week was genuinely inclusive of a multiplicity of trans voices.

I also asked Gonzalez-Siegel and Steiner how we could maintain trans visibility year round, rather than just for one week a year. In response, Gonzalez-Siegel asked, "What happens after Trans Awareness Week? How are folks engaging with communities?" She added, "I hear people ask this all of the time: 'What does it mean to engage in a community?' And it's through action."

"Of course the first thing to realize is that trans lives matter now, before, and forever," Steiner said. "Don't reduce a trans person to their trans identity—we are human first."

They then went on to specify concrete ways to support trans people in everyday life, like noting pronouns in social media profiles. Also crucial is taking meaningful action to create a safe and welcoming environment in and around campus. “If you are involved with a club or organization think about how you can make meetings and spaces more welcoming and affirming for trans people,” Steiner said.

As the school year progresses, I hope that we can continue to support and uplift our trans community at Columbia—not just during Trans Awareness Week, but every week. LGBTQ at Columbia hopes to continue to support the queer community here for many years to come, through listening to students’ needs, ensuring all voices are heard, and building genuinely safe spaces for queer and trans students to truly be themselves when at times it may be difficult to do so.

DEPT. OF THE C WORD
A Lion by Any Other Name

By Kelsey Kitzke

Shortly before the election, I went on a walk through Inwood Hill Park with my uncle, a resident of New York City for over 30 years and of Inwood for the last 15. Crowning upper Manhattan, Inwood Hill Park is virgin forest, meaning it has aged significantly without much disturbance, and unlike many other parks in the city, it’s mostly unlandscaped. It is also beautiful, one of those serene pockets of nature that you can’t believe is actually in Manhattan. Despite the fact that the park is just a short walk from the 1 train, the small caves formed by glaciers and some of the oldest trees on this little island feel far away from the grid and skyscrapers that have come to define our collective understanding of Manhattan. They feel so far away that they serve less as reminders of a different place than as reminders of a different time: This island, now so thoroughly manipulated and constructed upon, once belonged to the Lenape.

Eventually, my uncle and
I weaved our way up a hill
from which we could see,
across a small bay, the
enormous “C” painted on
a cliff at the water’s edge.
This C, of course, marks
Columbia’s athletic
facilities, located just a
short distance from this

pristine land. This is where, if not for the pandemic, the lights of evening Columbia football games would shine brightly through the rest of the neighborhood. As we walked back down through the park to the banks of the marsh, the C loomed more prominently. Next to us was a dock whose entry was chained off with signs posted by Columbia Facilities (people hop over the chains to go fishing anyway). I couldn't help but think about how domineering that C is: brazenly, arrogantly painted over natural rock formations that have existed in this spot before the University was founded and will continue to exist long after it is gone and the paint has chipped away.

Illustration by Madi Hermann

Names, however, are more than just paint. Names, like "Columbia," are a kind of memorial—a memorial that is repeated and reaffirmed with each eponymous t-shirt printed, each stroll through the gates of College Walk, each pennant taped proudly on the wall of a dorm room. Recently, of course, many of us have been rethinking and undoing namings. In June, the University announced plans to rename Bard Hall, a dormitory on the Medical Campus named after Samuel Bard, founder of the medical school and a slaveholder, drawing on research conducted by students in the groundbreaking Columbia University and Slavery seminar. There's also been talk of changing the names of Columbus, Ohio and the District of Columbia to pivot away from the legacy of Christopher Columbus. And yet, similar rumblings of a possible University-wide name change have not seemed to reach campus quite yet.

It would not be the University's first name change: Following the Revolutionary War, of course, "King's College," representing the monarchical rule of the past, was

changed to “Columbia,” the feminized personification of the new United States. In today’s climate,, I imagine that “Columbia” is more reminiscent of the brutal forces that stole and molded the island the University sits on while discarding the lives and cultures that existed before European colonization—similar to what we see today as the University dispossesses and displaces residents of West Harlem. This presents itself in many ways, but maybe the most obvious is the ubiquity of Columbia’s name in Upper Manhattan: It marks where Columbia claims space now and, therefore, where others in the community cannot. Maybe Columbia *is* an appropriate name for our school, after all—a constant reminder that the consequences of letting history repeat itself last longer than paint on a rock.

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Letter From the Editor, December 2020

Letter From the Editor, December 2018

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